

PICTURES BY A. WEIL

# The BRASS BOWL

By LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

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## CHAPTER XV.—(Continued.)

"Never fear, sir! We'll make it in five minutes!"

"It'll be worth your while."

"Right-O!"

Maitland dropped into his seat, dejected.

"Good Lord!" he whistled, and then, savagely: "In the power of that infamous scoundrel!"

And felt of the revolver in his pocket.

The cab had been headed north; the St. Luke roars its massive bulk south of Twenty-second street.

The driver expertly swung his vehicle almost on a dime.

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at the top of the shaft. Another summons gained no response, in likewise, and a third was also disregarded.

Hickey stepped back, face black as a storm-cloud, summed up his opinion of the management of the building in one scathing phrase, produced his bandanna and used it vigorously, uttered a libel on the ancestry of the night-watchman and the likes of him, and turned to give profane welcome to the policeman who had noticed the cab at Twenty-third street and who now panted in, blown and perspiring. Much to his disgust he found himself assigned to stand guard over the basement exit, and waddled forth again into the street.

Meanwhile the first officer to arrive upon the scene was taking his turn at agitating the button and shaking the gates; and with no more profit of his undertaking than Hickey. After a minute or two of it he acknowledged defeat with an oath, and turned away to browbeat the straggling vanguard of belated wayfarers—messenger boys, slatternly drabs, hackmen, loafers, and one or two plain citizens conspicuously out of their reputable grooves—who were drifting in at the entrance to line the lobby walls with blank, curious faces. Forerunners of that mysterious rabble which is apparently precipitated out of the very air by any extraordinary happening in city streets, if allowed to remain they would in five minutes have waxed in numbers to the proportions of an unmanageable mob; and the policeman, knowing this, set about dispersing them with perhaps greater discretion than consideration.

They wavered and fell back, grumbling discontentedly; and Maitland, his anxiety temporarily distracted by the noise they made, looked round to find his erstwhile cabby at his elbow. Of whom the sight was inspiration. Ever thoughtful, never unmindful of her whose influence held him in this coil, he laid an arresting hand on the man's sleeve.

"You've got your cab—?"

"Yissir, right houtside."

"Drive round the corner, away from the crowd, and wait for me. If she—the young lady—comes without me, drive her anywhere she tells you and come to my rooms to-morrow morning for your pay."

"Thankee, sir."

Maitland turned back, to find the situation round the elevator shaft in statu quo. Nothing had happened, save that Hickey's rage and vexation had increased mightily.

"But why don't you go up after him?"

"How 'n blazes can I?" exploded the detective. "He's got th' night car. 'F I takes the stairs, he comes down by th' shaft, 'nd how'm I tuh trust this here mutt?"

He indicated his associate but humbler custodian of the peace with a disgusted gesture.

"Perhaps one of the other cars will run—"

"Ah, they're all dead ones," Hickey disagreed with disdain as the young man moved down the row of gates, trying one after another. "Yeh're only wastin'—"

He broke off with a snort as Maitland, somewhat to his own surprise, managing to move the gate of the third shaft from the night elevator, stepped into the darkened car and groped for the controller. Presently his fingers encountered it, and he moved it cautiously to one side.

A vicious blue spark leaped hissing from the controller-box and the cage bounded up a dozen feet, and was only restrained from its ambition to soar skywards by an instantaneous release of the lever.

By discreet manipulation Maitland worked the car down to the street floor again, and Hickey, with a grunt that might be interpreted as an apology for his incredulity, jumped in.

"Let 'er rip!" he cried, exultantly.

"Fan them folks out intuh th' street, Bergen, 'nd wafch ow-ut!"

Maitland was pressing the lever slowly wide of its catch, and the lighted lobby dropped out of sight while the detective was still shouting admonitions to the police below. Gradually gaining momentum the car began to shoot smoothly up into the blackness, safety chains clanking beneath the floor. Hickey fumbled for the electric light switch but, finding it, immediately shut the glare off again and left the car in darkness.

"Safer," he explained, sententious.

"Anisy 'll shoot, 'nd they says he shoots straight."

Floor after floor in ghostly straits slipped silently down before their eyes. Half-way to the top, approximately, Hickey's voice rang sharply in the volunteer operator's ear.

"Stop 'er! Hold 'er steady. Tother's comin' down."

Maitland obeyed, managing the car with greater ease and less jerkily as he began to understand the principle of the lever. The cage paused in the black shaft, and he looked upward.

Down the third shaft over, the other cage was dropping like a plummet, a block of golden light walled in by black filigree-work and bisected vertically by the black line of the guide-rail.

"Stop that there car!"

Hickey's stentorian command had no effect; the block of light continued to fall with unabated speed.

The detective wasted no more breath. As the other car swept past, Maitland was shocked by a report and flash beside him. Hickey was using his revolver.

The detonation was answered by a cry, a scream of pain, from the lighted cage. It paused on the instant, like a bird stricken a-wing, some four floors below, but at once resumed its downward swoop.

"Down, down! After 'em!" Hickey yelled. "I dropped one, by God! Tother can't—"

"How many in the car?" interrupted

Maitland, opening the lever with a firm and careful hand.

"Only two, same's us. I hit th' feller what was runnin' it—"

"Steady!" cautioned Maitland, decreasing the speed, as the car approached the lower floor.

But its arrival at the street level was greeted by a short chorus of mad yells, a brief fusillade of shots—perhaps five in all—and the clang of the gate. Then, like a ball rebounding, the cage swung upwards again, hurtling at full speed.

Evidently Anisy had been received in force which he had not bargained for.

Maitland instinctively reversed the lever and sent his own car upward again, slowly, waiting for the other to overtake it. Peering down through the iron lattice-work he could indistinctly observe the growing cube of light, with a dark shape lying huddled in one corner of the floor. A second figure, rapidly taking shape as Anisy's, stood by the controller, braced against the side of the car, one hand on the lever, the other pointing a shining thing, the flesh-colored oval of his face

turned upwards in a supposititious attempt to discern the location of the dark car.

Hickey, by firing prematurely, lent him adventitious aid. The criminal replied with spirit, aiming at the flash his bullet spattering against the back wall of the shaft. Hickey's next bullet rang with a bell-like note against the metal-work, Anisy's presumably went wide—though Maitland could have sworn he felt the cold kiss of its breath upon his cheek. And the lighted cage rocked past and up.

Maitland needed no admonition to pursue; his blood was up, his heart singing with the lust of the man-hunt. Yet Anisy was rapidly leaving them. His car soaring at an appalling pace. Towards the top he evidently made some attempt to slow up, but either he was ignorant of the management of the lever, or else the thing had got beyond control. The cage rammed the buffers with a crash that echoed through the sounding halls like a peal of thunder-claps; it was instantaneous plunged into darkness. There followed a splintering and rending sound, and Maitland, heart in mouth could make out dimly a dark, falling shadow in the further shaft. Yet ere it had descended a score of feet the safety-clutch acted, and with a third tremendous jar, shaking the building, the car halted.

Hickey and Maitland were then some five floors below. "Stop 'er at 19," ordered the detective. There was a lull of exultation in his voice. "We got him now, all right, all right. He'll try to get down by—There!"

Overhead the crash of a gate forced open was followed by a scurry of footsteps over the tiling. "Stop 'er and we'll head him off. So now—e-e-e-e-e!"

Maitland shut off the power as the car reached the nineteenth floor. Hickey opened the gate and jumped out. "Shut that," he commanded sharply, as Maitland followed him, "in case he gets past us."

He paused a moment in thought, heavy head on bull-neck drooping forward as he stared toward the rear of the building. He was fearless and resourceful, for all his many deficiencies Maitland found time, quaintly enough to regard him with detached curiosity, a rare animal, illustrating all that was best and worst in his order. Endowed with exceptional courage, his address in emergencies seemed altogether admirable.

"Yeh guard them stairs," he decided suddenly. "I'll run through this hall, 'nd see what's doing. Don't hesitate to shoot if he tries to jump yeh." And was gone, clamping briskly down the corridor to the rear.

Maitland, yielding the initiative to the other's superior generalship, stood sentinel, revolver in hand, until the detective returned, overheated and sweating, from his tour, to report "nothin' doin'." with characteristic brevity. He had the same report to make on both the twentieth and twenty-first floors, where the same procedure was observed, but as the latter was reached unexpected and very welcome reinforcements were gained by the arrival of a third car, containing three patrolmen and one roundsman. Yet numbers created delay; Hickey was seized and compelled to pant explanations to his supreme disgust.

And, suddenly impatient beyond endurance, Maitland left them and alone swung up the stairs.

That this was simple foolhardiness may be granted without dispute. But it must be borne in mind that he was very young and ardent, very greatly perturbed on behalf of an actor in

the tragedy in whom the police, to their then knowledge, had no interest whatsoever. And if in the heat of chase he had for an instant forgotten her, now he remembered; and at once the capture of Anisy was relegated to the status of a matter of secondary importance. The real matter at stake was the safety of the girl whom Anisy, by exercise of an infernal ingenuity that passed Maitland's comprehension, had managed to spirit into this place of death and darkness and whispering halls. Where she might be, in what degree of suffering and danger—these were the considerations that sent him in search of her without a thought of personal peril, but with a sick heart and overwhelmed with a stifling sense of anxiety.

More active than the paunch-burdened detective, he had sprinted down and back through the hallway of the twenty-second floor, without discovering anything, ere the police contingent had reached an agreement and the stairhead.

There remained two more floors, two final flights. A little hopelessly he swung up the first. And as he did so the blackness above him was riven by a tongue of fire, and a bullet, singling past his head, flattened itself with a vicious spat against the marble dado of the walls. Instinctively he pulled up, finger closing upon the trigger of his revolver; flash and report followed the motion, and a panel of ribbed glass in a door overhead was splintered and fell in clashing fragments, all but drowning the sound of feet in flight upon the upper stairhead.

A clamor of caution, warning, encouragement, and advice broke out from the police below. But Maitland hardly heard. Already he was again in pursuit, taking the steps two at a leap. With a hand upon the newel-post he swung round on the twenty-third floor, and hurled himself toward the foot of the last flight. A crash like a rifle-shot rang out above, and for a second he fancied that Anisy had fired again, and with a heavier weapon. But immediately he realized that the noise had been only the slamming of the door at the head of the stairs—the door whose glazed panel loomed above him, shedding a diffused light to guide his footsteps, its opalescent surface lettered with the name of HENRY M. BANNERMAN.

Attorney & Counselor-at-Law.

the door of the office whose threshold he had so often crossed to meet a friend and adviser. It was with a shock that he comprehended this, a thrill of wonder. He had all but forgotten that Bannerman owned an office in the building, in the rush, the urge of this wild adventure. Strange that Anisy should have chosen it for the scene of his last stand—strange, and strangely fatal for the criminal! For Maitland knew that from this eyrie there was no means of escape, other than by the stairs.

Well and good! Then they had the man, and—

The thought was flashing in his mind, illumining the darkness of his despair with the hope that he would be able to force a word as to the girl's whereabouts from the burglar ere the police arrived; Maitland's foot was on the upper step, when a scream of mortal terror—her voice!—broke from within. Half-maddened, he threw himself bodily against the door, twisting the knob with frantic fingers that slipped upon its immovable polished surface.

The bolt had been shot, he was barred out, and with only the width of a man's hand between them, the girl was in deadly peril and terror.

A sob that was at the same time an oath rose to his lips. Baffled, helpless, he fell back, tears of rage starting to his eyes, her accents ringing in his ears as terribly pitiful as the cry of a lost and wandering soul.

"God!" he mumbled incoherently, and in desperation sent the pistol-butt crashing against the glass. It was tough, stubborn; the first blow scarcely flamed it. As he redoubled his efforts to shatter it, Hickey's hand shot over his shoulder to aid him.

And with startling abruptness the barrier seemed to dissolve before their eyes, the glass falling inward with a shrill clatter.

Quaintly, with the effect of a picture cast by a cinematograph in a darkened auditorium, there loomed upon Maitland's field of vision the picture of Anisy standing at bay, face drawn and tense, lips curled back, eyes lurid with defiance and despair. He stood, poised upon the balls of his feet, like a cat ready to spring, in the doorway between the inner and outer offices. He raised his hand with an indescribably swift and vicious gesture, and a flame seemed to blaze out from his fingertips.

At the same instant Hickey's weapon spat by Maitland's cheek; the young man felt the hot furnace breath of it.

The burglar recoiled as though from a tremendous blow. His inflated features were suddenly whitened, and his right arm dropped limply from the shoulder, revolver falling from fingers involuntarily relaxing.

Hickey covered him. "Surrender!" he roared. And fired again. For Anisy had gone to his knees, reaching for the revolver with his unlabeled arm.

The detective's second bullet winced through the doorway, over Anisy's head, and but through the outer window. As Anisy, with a tremendous strain upon his failing powers, struggled to his feet, Maitland, catching the murderous gleam in the man's eye, pulled trigger. The burglar's answering shot expended itself as harmlessly as Maitland's. Both went wide of their marks.

And of a sudden Hickey had drawn the bolt; and the body of police behind forced Maitland pell-mell into the room. As he recovered he saw Hickey hurling himself at the criminal's throat—use second too late. True to his

pledge never to be taken alive, Anisy had sent his last bullet crashing through his own skull.

A cry of horror and consternation forced itself from Maitland's throat. The police halted, each where he stood, transfixed. Anisy drew himself up, with a trace of pride in his pose; smiled horribly; put a hand mechanically to his lips.

And died.

Hickey caught him as he fell, but Maitland, unheeding, heaped over the body that had in life resembled him so fatally, and entered Bannerman's private office.

The gray girl lay at length in a corner of the room, shielded from observation by one of the desks. Her eyes were closed, her cheeks wore the hue of death; the fair young head was pillowed on one white and rounded forearm, in an attitude of natural rest, and the burnished hair, its heavy curls slipping from their fastenings, tumbled over her head and shoulders in shimmering glory, like a splash of living flame.

With a low and bitter cry the young men dropped to his knees by her side. In the outer office the police were assembled in excited convulsion, blind to all save the momentous fact of Anisy's last, supremely consistent deed. For the time Maitland was utterly alone with his great and aching loneliness.

After a little while timidly he touched her hand. It lay upturned, white slender fingers like exotic petals curling in upon the rosy hollow of her palm. And it was soft and warm.

He lifted it tenderly in both his own, and so held it for a space, breathing, marveling at its perfection. And inevitably he bent and touched it with his lips, as if their ardent contact would warm it to sentience.

The fingers tightened upon his own, slowly, surely; and in the binding joy of that moment he was made conscious of the ineffable sweetness of opening, wondering eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

Recessional.

"Jim, humm!" Thus Hickey, the inopportunist ubiquitous, lumbering hastily in from the other office and checking, in an extreme of embarrassment, in the middle of the floor.

Maitland glanced over his shoulder, and, substituting a desire to flay the man alive, released the girl's hand.

"I say, Hickey," he observed, carefully suppressing every vestige of emotion, "will you lend me a hand here? Bring a chair, please, and a glass of water."

The detective stumbled over his feet and brought the chair at the risk of his neck. Then he went away and returned with the water. In the meantime the girl, silently enough for all that her eyes were speaking, with Maitland's assistance arose and seated herself.

"You will have to stay here a few minutes," he told her, "until—er—"

"I understand," she told him in a choking tone.

Hickey awkwardly handed her the glass. She sipped mechanically.

"I have a cab below," continued Maitland. "And I'll try to arrange it so that we can get out of the building without having to force a way through the crowd."

She thanked him with a glance.

"There's th' freight elevator," suggested Hickey, helpfully.

"Thank you," Is there anything I can do for you, anything you wish?" continued Maitland to the girl, standing between her and the detective.

She lifted her face to his and shook her head, very gently. "No," she

breathed through trembling lips. "You—yeh've been—"

"But there was a sob in her throat, and she hung her head again.

"Not a word," ordered Maitland. "Sit here for a few minutes, if you can, drink the water and—ah—fix up your hat, you know." (damn Hickey! Why the devil did the fellow insist on hanging round so?) "And I will go and make arrangements."

"Th-thank you," whispered the small voice shakily.

Maitland hesitated a moment, then turned upon Hickey in sudden exasperation. His manner was enough, even the obtuse detective could not ignore it. Maitland had no need to speak.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, standing his ground manfully but with a trace more of respect in his manner than had theretofore characterized it. "but there's uh gentleman—uh—your friend, Bannerman's outside 'nd wants tuh speak tuh yeh."

"Tell him to—"

"Excuse me," he says, and then see yeh. If yeh don't come out, he'll come after yeh. I thought yeh'd rather—"

"That's kindly thought of," Maitland related. "I'll be there in a minute," he added, meaningly.

Hickey took an impressive face to the doorway, where, whether or not with design, he stood precisely upon the threshold, fling it with his body shoulders, Maitland bent again